Anarcho
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This update of **Property is Theft!** is focused on two key issues, Proudhon and Marx as well as Proudhon's influence on the Paris Commune (which explains why it has been updated on the 18th of March!). The two are inter-related, simply because many key "Marxist" positions are first found in Proudhon's work or date from the 1871 revolt and, ironically, simply repeat the ideas raised by the Communards who in turn found them in Proudhon…

The update involves the appendix of texts from the Commune as well as Proudhon's 1846 letter to Marx and extracts from **System of Economic Contradictions** (both volume 1 and volume 2, some of the later translated for the first time). This work, as most people will know, produced Marx's **The Poverty of Philosophy** in response and, sadly, many radicals will only know Proudhon from that hatchet-job. The appendix to the introduction on "Proudhon and Marx" is also posted. Marx's 1847 work is discussed here, along with general points on Proudhon's influence on Marx (influence from Marx

to Proudhon is harder to find, probably because there is none – claims by Engels and Marx otherwise not withstanding).

The volume 1 extracts are from Benjamin Tucker's 1888 translation (which is available on-line). I have corrected some of the translation, mostly in relation to Tucker translating *"salariat"* as "wages" rather than wage-labour or wage-workers. The glossary has more information but the changes are essential for both accuracy in translation and to reflect Proudhon's awareness of, and opposition to, wage-labour (something readers of Marx may not be aware of). Any change, though, has an endnote indicating what it was originally. I have also taken the liberty of adding notes to the extracts from **System of Economic Contradictions** (**System**) with relevant quotes from **Poverty of Philosophy** in order to compare what Proudhon actually wrote to what Marx claimed he did. The contrast is enlightening.

Suffice to say, while Marx's work does contain a few valid points against Proudhon it is marred by the distortions, selective quoting and (at times) inventions he inflicts on his readers. Much of the accepted wisdom on Proudhon flows from this hatch-job, most obviously the idea he wanted to return to small-scale production. Never mind that Proudhon explicitly rejects such a view in that work, this did not stop Marx suggesting he did! Then there is that old perennial that Proudhon ignored the *"relations of production"* and so failed to recognise the unique nature of modern property (namely, its basis in wage-labour and capital).

This is a charge hard to take seriously if you actually ***read*** Proudhon two volumes – but since few Marxists (or anarchists, to be honest) would do that, Marx's false claims get repeated (as we discuss below). It is fair to say that **System** it is often unfocused and goes off at tangents to the main topic (the chapter on *"Property"* starts with a long discussion on how we interpret world and also discusses the benefits of marriage!). Yet there are important and significant insights in it so while by

This is not to suggest that we dump Marx in favour of Proudhon (or vice versa!) but simply that attempts by Marxists from Marx onwards to ridicule and dismiss Proudhon need to be rejected. Credit should be given where credit is due. However, to do that would be to acknowledge that, firstly, Marx distorted much of Proudhon's ideas to gain cheap polemical points (a tendency his followers have continued when they discuss anarchism) and, secondly, that many so-called "Marxist" principles were first expounded by anarchists (Proudhon and Bakunin). For some reason, I doubt many Marxists will do so. I hope to be proven wrong. I do hope, however, that anarchists will take the time to look at Proudhon with fresh eyes and recognise there was a reason revolutionary anarchists like Bakunin, Kropotkin, Rocker and Guérin were so impressed by (many, not all, of) his ideas.

no means Proudhon's best work, **System** does contain important material which we have extracted for the anthology and which we sketch here.

In short, neither it nor its author deserves the (usually ignorant) abuse heaped upon them. Particularly, as I attempt to outline, it contains many key libertarian concepts – some of which Marx later appropriated wholesale! Much the same can be said of Proudhon's works considered as a whole – particularly when Marx dismisses Proudhon while praising the Paris Commune which implemented so many of his ideas!

Proudhon's posthumous influence on the commune is discussed in the introduction – as well as in my article "The Paris Commune, Marxism and Anarchism" (**Anarcho-Syndicalist Review**, no. 50). An introduction to the commune can be found in section A.5.1 of An Anarchist FAQ. What is most obvious is how ignorant most Marxists are on this. They seem to think that the Communards spontaneously developed these ideas without any influence of the ideas and history of radical social movements they were part of! For example, Tony Cliff (**Trotskyism after Trotsky**, Bookmarks, 1999) asserts the following:

> *"Another turning point was the Paris Commune in 1871 which inspired Marx to write in **The Civil War in France**, 'The working class cannot take the old state machine to use it to build socialism.' He argued that the working class must smash the capitalist state machine and build a new state without a police force, a standing army or a bureaucracy, a state in which all officials should be elected, instantly recallable and should get the same wages as the workers they represent. The **Communist Manifesto** had not mentioned any of this. Now Marx recognised the central features of a workers' state. He did not reach these conclusions from study-*

> *ing hard in the British Museum. His understanding flowed from the actions of the Parisian workers who took power for 74 days and showed what kind of state the working class could establish."* (p. 7)

Very true, the **Communist Manifesto** did **not** mention this (instead it presented a vision of social change rooted in seizing the state by means of universal suffrage: *"winning the battle for democracy"*). However, ***Proudhon*** raised much of the Communard's vision… in 1848! He raised the principle of recalling elected people (and mandating, another Communard principle which Cliff forgets to mention) in the second pamphlet he wrote after the February revolution (dated 26th March and entitled **"Democracy"** – this has been freshly translated for **Property is Theft!** but extracts of a previous translation are on-line). He re-iterated this in his second election Manifesto later that year:

> *"It is up to the National Assembly, through organisation of its committees, to exercise executive power, just the way it exercises legislative power … Besides universal suffrage and as a consequence of universal suffrage, we want implementation of the binding mandate. Politicians balk at it! Which means that in their eyes, the people, in electing representatives, do not appoint mandatories but rather abjure their sovereignty! That is assuredly not socialism: it is not even democracy."* (**No Gods, No Masters**, pp. 78–9)

And, as can be seen, for good measure adds the fusion of executive and legislative functions in one body – another Communard position Cliff fails to mention (and which Marx praised). So by 1871 Marx, finally, caught up with Proudhon – thanks to the actions of his followers in Paris! It does seem

positions once Proudhon's followers applied them in the Paris Commune. That in the 1848 revolution Proudhon's predictions on both the danger of an Executive and that the state cannot be captured by political action and reformed were proven correct. Marx and Engels, on the other hand, saw their analysis of the state (and its executive) disproved while their notion that universal suffrage gave workers political power and could be used to capture (and then transform) the state is one even their followers reject (probably, ironically, as non-Marxist!). In terms of the "Marxist" analysis of property, it is basically regurgitating Proudhon's. That it was first Proudhon who called for the end of wage-labour by means of federated workers' associations. That it was Proudhon, not Marx, who first argued that working class people should organise autonomously to influence social change.

So, as should be clear from this discussion and the extracts from **System of Economic Contradictions** included in **Property is Theft**, Proudhon's much mocked work is important. In terms of understanding the evolution of anarchist thought, it contains many ideas which subsequent anarchists have developed. It also contains an analysis of capitalism which is rooted in class analysis with an understanding of the unique social relationships which mark it – and an awareness that these relations can and will change. Mostly a work of analysis and critique (of both capitalism and state socialism), what few sketches it presents of a free future based on associated labour. By no means a perfect work nor one of Proudhon's best, it is worth consulting critically to draw out the useful material. Needless to say, Marx made no such analysis and preferred distortion and diatribe. Moreover, Proudhon's comment seems valid: *"what Marx's book really means is that he is sorry that everywhere **I** have thought the way **he** does, and said so before he did. Any determined reader can see that it is Marx who, having read me, regrets thinking like me. What a man!"*

> *of wage labour, of capital and of their mutual relations'. Thus, here, for the first time, the proposition is formulated by which modern workers' socialism is sharply differentiated both from all the different shades of feudal, bourgeois, petty-bourgeois, etc., socialism and from the confused community of goods of utopian and of primitive workers' communism."* (pp. 10–1)

Really? Had not Proudhon proclaimed in 1848 the following:

> *"We do not want to see the State confiscate the mines, canals and railways: that would be to add to monarchy, and more wage-labour. We want the mines, canals, railways handed over to democratically organised workers' associations operating under State supervision, in conditions laid down by the State, and under their own responsibility. We want these associations to be models for agriculture, industry and trade, the pioneering core of that vast federation of companies and societies woven into the common cloth of the democratic social Republic."* (**No Gods, No Masters**, p. 78)

Suffice to say, Proudhon's position was one of raising popular demands and of *reformist* transition and so his call upon the state (a position, I should note, Engels also advocated). However, the important point is here we have Proudhon proclaiming two years *before* Marx a basic position of "*modern workers' socialism"*, namely the end of wage-labour by means of a federation of workers' associations (*"the associated working class"*). This, as can be seen, was hardly a rare occurrence!

So, what can be said? That many "Marxist" insights were first expounded by Proudhon long before Marx proclaimed them. That Marx only took up many so-called "Marxist"

ironic that the person Marx dismissed as a *"petit-bourgeois"* (or just a *"bourgeois"* socialist) advocated "*the central features of a workers' state*" 23 years before Marx did…

And, need I stress, Proudhon was hardly working in a social vacuum and was, undoubtedly, reflecting, developing and formulising what was being discussed in working class radical circles. However, the obvious application of Proudhon's ideas was hardly lost on libertarians at the time: *"Federalism, in the sense given to it by the Paris Commune, and that was given to it many years ago by the great socialist Proudhon, who first scientifically outlined the theory,—federalism is above all the negation of the nation and the State."* (James Guillaume, **Federalism**). Nor, presumably, on Marx…

So in reporting on the Commune (and much of Marx's **Civil War in France** is simply stating what happened) Marx presented ideas which libertarians like Proudhon and Bakunin had been arguing for some years. Mandating delegates, instant recall, federalism, replacing wage-labour with associative production, all were advocated by Proudhon long before his followers helped introduce them in 1871 (and it is somewhat amusing to compare Marx's praise of the Commune within his dismissal of the French Internationalists five years before – as we do!).

However, a key difference is that Proudhon refused to describe this radically different social organisation a "state." He explained his reasoning in his polemic with Louis Blanc and Pierre Leroux (also see Proudhon's letter to Leroux and a later article in the same discussion). In a way, implicitly Cliff recognises this obvious fact by talking about "*a new state"* and "*a workers' state.*" Which raises the question, if it is ***so*** different, such an inversion of what we have always known as a "state", then why call it a state? Simply because the "new" state will be a centralised structure in which power will be delegated into the hands of a government (made up of the likes of Cliff, so they hope). In short, it retains some of the (negative) features

of the "old" state – features which have evolved to marginalise the many and empower the ruling few. Unsurprisingly, the so-called "workers' state" of the Bolsheviks quickly became as hierarchical and repressive as the "old" ones and, almost as quickly, the party bosses came to see this as no bad thing…

This is not the first time we find Proudhon proclaiming so-called "Marxist" principle before Marx. As we noted in the introduction, Proudhon expounded the ("Marxist") theory of surplus value in 1840 long before Marx. Engels summarised Marx's theory, stating that the *"value of the labour-power, and the value which that labour-power creates in the labour-process, are two different magnitudes"* and so if *"the labourer each day* **costs** *the owner of money the value of the product of six hours' labour"* and works twelve, he *"**hands over**"* to the capitalist *"each day the value of the product of twelve hours' labour."* The difference in favour of the owner is *"unpaid surplus-labour, a surplus-product."* He gushes that the *"solution of this problem was the most epoch-making achievement of Marx's work. It spread the clear light of day through economic domains in which socialists no less than bourgeois economists previously groped in utter darkness. Scientific socialism dates from the discovery of this solution and has been built up around it."* (**Marx Engels Collected Works**, vol. 25, pp. 189–90)

Compare this to Proudhon:

> *"Whoever labours becomes a proprietor … And when I say proprietor, I do not mean simply (as do our hypocritical economists) proprietor of his allowance, his salary, his wages, – I mean proprietor of the value his creates, and by which the master alone profits …* ***The labourer retains, even after he has received his wages, a natural right in the thing he has produced."*** (**What is Property?**, pp. 123–4)

Property meant *"another shall perform the labour while [the proprietor] receives the product."* So the *"free worker produces*

> *which the proletariat, as an independent political party, declared its separation from the democratic party."* (p. 70)

What Marx does not mention is that this was Proudhon's position:

> *"Raspail, the socialist democrat … In lending our backing to this candidature, we do not, as the honorable Monsieur Ledru-Rollin had written somewhere, intend to endow the Republic with a possible chief: far from it. We accept Raspail as a living protest against the very idea of Presidency! We offer him to the people's suffrage, not because he is or believes himself possible, but because he is impossible: because with him, presidency, the mirror-image of royalty, would be impossible … We back Raspail's candidacy, so as to focus the eyes of the country all the more strongly upon this idea, that henceforth, under the banner of the Republic, there are but two parties in France, the party of labour and the party of capital."* (**No Gods, No Masters**, p. 80)

It was not only politically that the "petit-bourgeois" Proudhon anticipated "proletarian" Marxism. We find Engels in the 1895 introduction to Marx's **The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850** stating:

> *"In the second chapter, in connection with the 'right to work', which is described as 'the first clumsy formula wherein the revolutionary demands of the proletariat are summarised', it is said: 'but behind the right to work stands the power over capital; behind the power over capital, the* **appropriation of the means of production**, *their subjection to the associated working class and, therefore, the abolition*

development of Proudhon's statement in **System** that *"the problem of association consists in organising ... the producers, and by this organisation subjecting capital and subordinating power. Such is the war that you have to sustain: a war of labour against capital; a war of liberty against authority; a war of the producer against the non-producer; a war of equality against privilege"*.

So Proudhon's idea of organising outside of politics and the state, of building *"a greater authority"* to the state by the working classes, was applied by the collectivist anarchists in the IWMA (what Bakunin later called the *"social power"* or "*non-political or anti-political power"* of the working classes) as well as the syndicalists. Echoing Proudhon (and Bakunin), leading syndicalist Fernand Pelloutier argued that the aim was *"to constitute within the bourgeois State a veritable socialist (economic and anarchic) State."* (quoted by Jeremy Jennings, **Syndicalism in France: a study of ideas** (Macmillan, 1990), p. 22). The IWW's *"we are building a new world in the shell of the old"* has obvious similarities to Proudhon's 1848 call.

That Proudhon was at the forefront in expressing the most advanced opinions of the working classes can also be found in Marx's **The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850**:

> *"The more advanced sections of the two classes [petty bourgeoisie and proletariat], however, put forward their own candidates. Napoleon was the **collective name** of all parties in coalition against the bourgeois republic; **Ledru-Rollin** and **Raspail** were the **proper names**, the former of the democratic petty bourgeoisie, the latter of the revolutionary proletariat. The votes for Raspail – the proletarians and their socialist spokesmen declared it loudly – were to be merely a demonstration, so many protests against any presidency, that is, against the constitution itself ... the first act by*

ten; for me, thinks the proprietor, he will produce twelve" and so to *"satisfy property, the labourer must first produce beyond his needs."* (p. 98, pp. 184–5) That was part of the reason why *"property is theft"*! Proudhon had also proclaimed the need for a *"scientific socialism"* in **What is Property?** so Engels was right in a sense...

Marx makes great play of Proudhon's supposed unawareness of *"the relations of production"* and how they change in **Poverty of Philosophy**. He muttered about how Proudhon *"borrows from the economists the necessity of eternal relations"* while ignoring such comments from **System** (volume 1) as the *"error of Malthus, the radical vice of political economy, consists, in general terms, in affirming as a definitive state a transitory condition, – namely, the division of society into patricians and proletaires."*

Marx's assertions about Proudhon are repeated by his followers. A slight diversion into Cliff's "theory" of Stalinist Russia as *"state capitalist"* is required to show this (and how repetition of this assertion negates the need to actually think about the relations of production). First, it should be noted that anarchists (and other socialists) had been calling the Soviet regime "state capitalist" for some time, under Lenin in fact – after predicting that state socialism would just be capitalism with the state replacing the boss. Cliff came to call it so nearly three decades later (*"Russia was defined as state capitalist by the present author ... in 1948"* (p. 24)) Sadly, the delay did not produce a better analysis....

The reason why it is not a better analysis is exposed by, ironically, Cliff's regurgitating Marx's attack on Proudhon. Cliff states *"Marx ridiculed Proudhon's attempt to define private property independently of the relations of production"* (p. 30) and *"Proudhon ... abstracted the form of property from the relations of production"* (p. 32) and quotes Marx from **"The Poverty of Philosophy"**:

> *"In each historical epoch, property has developed differently and under a set of entirely different social relations. Thus to define bourgeois property is nothing less than to give an exposition of all the social relations of bourgeois production. To try to give a definition of property as if an independent relation, a category apart – an abstract eternal idea – can be nothing but an illusion of metaphysics or jurisprudence."*(p. 30)

Marx , needless to say, does (on occasion) the same thing, he attacks Proudhon for – namely suggesting that the various forms of "property" have something in common and so warrant the term "property." Looking at the **Communist Manifesto**, for example, Marx and Engels argue that the *"distinguishing feature of Communism is not the abolition of property generally, but the abolition of bourgeois property."* Yet even using the term *"property generally"* shows the weakness of Marx's attack on Proudhon. Yes, property does change overtime and specific forms of property have specific social relations associated with them but, surely, it is possible to generalise these into a category called "property"? There have been many states and gods, for example, but to suggest that using the general term "state" or "god" to group these together based on what they have in common is meaningless metaphysics is, on the face of it, a bizarre suggestion.

And if, as Cliff suggests, Marx mocks Proudhon for defining "property" without looking at its social relations (which is false) then why even mention *"property generally"*? Particularly when Marx and Engels then conclude: *"In this sense, the theory of the Communists may be summed up in the single sentence: Abolition of private property."* Oh, right. Proudhon is attacked for failing to distinguish forms of property yet Marx feels happy to sum up his ideology as the abolition of *"private property"*! Need it be pointed out that it was this sentance,

..., a state within the state, in opposition to the bourgeois representatives." He urged that *"a new society be founded in the heart of the old society"* by the working class for *"the government can do nothing for you. But you can do everything for yourselves."* ("*Aux Pariotes*", **La Représantant du Peuple**, No. 33) In **Confessions**, he pointed to the direct democratic clubs as another example of this popular self-management, that the clubs "*had to be organised. The organisation of popular societies was the fulcrum of democracy, the corner-stone of the republican order.*" These were *"the one institution that democratic authorities should have respected, and not just respected but also fostered and organised."* (**No Gods, No Masters**, p. 63)

So here we have a call for a dual-power within a state in early 1848 and support for the clubs which Marx subsequently echoed in 1850 in an address to the **Communist League.** (**Marx-Engels Reader**, pp. 507–8) Hal Draper showed his usual historical illiteracy by proclaiming that this *"passage [by Marx] in the March Address is the first great sketch of an approach to revolutionary power around what later came to be called* ***workers' councils****."* (**Karl Marx's Theory of Revolution: The 'Dictatorship of the Proletariat'** (Monthly Review Press, 1986),volume III, p. 346) Yes, the "first great sketch" if we ignore (yet again!) the awkward fact that Proudhon said it first! But we cannot really expect any better from a numpty like Draper...

Marx makes no mention of how these bodies should be organised, but talk of *"municipal councils"* suggests that workplace-based councils were alien to him. Significantly, *"[a]s early as the 1860's and 1870's, the followers of Proudhon and Bakunin in the First International were proposing the formation of workers' councils designed both as a weapon of class struggle against capitalists and as the structural basis of the future libertarian society."* (Paul Avrich, **The Russian Anarchists** (AK Press, 2005), p. 73) This would be an obvious

> *classes, then, consists, not in capturing, but in subduing both power and monopoly, – that is, in generating from the bowels of the people, from the depths of labour, a greater authority, a more potent fact, which shall envelop capital and the State and subjugate them. Every proposition of reform which does not satisfy this condition is simply one scourge more, a rod doing sentry duty,* ***virgem vigilantem****, as a prophet said, which threatens the proletariat."*

In 1849, Proudhon quotes these lines after chronicling the reaction against social reform by the bourgeois politicians in Chapter X of **"Confessions of a Revolutionary."** He adds these words *"are the prophecy of the events that we have seen take place in 1848 and 1849. It is by stubbornly wanting revolution through power and social reform through political reform that the February revolution was postponed, and the cause of the proletariat and nationalities was lost by all of Europe."* Marx, a year later in 1850, was still suggesting that universal suffrage gave workers political power which could be used to capture the state (which would then have to be radically refashioned, of course). Hell, he (and Engels) still suggested that universal suffrage could be used to create socialism ***after*** the Paris Commune for countries like Britain, USA and Holland!

Need I point out that most Marxists today would dismiss the notion that universal suffrage would be utilised in this way as reformist nonsense? That they would suggest that the state cannot be captured and reformed? In other words, that they take a "***Proudhonist***" position as suggested in the much mocked **System of Economic Contradictions** rather than a "***Marxist***" one? Or that if they argue for the need for workers' councils (soviets, etc.) they follow Bakunin, not Marx, who (in turn) followed the path that Proudhon suggested?

Significantly, in the early days of the 1848 revolution Proudhon argued that *"a body representative of the proletariat*

not the various historical musings that preceeded it, that was quoted when discussing the aim of Marxism?

Not that Marx took his own advice, of course. He often used the term "property" in very general ways. For example, Marx sounded very much like Proudhon when he stated that *"the private property of particular individuals in the earth will appear just as absurd as the private property of one man in other men. Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the earth. They are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries."* (**Capital**, vol. 3, p. 911) Clearly Marx had forgotten to talk of *"private property"* in the land without discussing precisely the differing social relations in each historical period was nothing but *"an illusion of metaphysics"*!

Ignoring the difficulties in denouncing someone for using the common practice of generalising specifics into universals (if only to save having to continually add words like *"bourgeois"* or *"modern bourgeois private"* before *"property"*!), the fact is that Proudhon recognised that capitalist society had specific, and new, social relationships. As is clear from Proudhon's discussion of "property" in **System** (or, for that matter, in **What is Property?**), he was well aware that the current system was based on wage-labour. To quote from Volume 2:

> *"Thus, property, which should make us free, makes us prisoners. What am I saying? It degrades us, by making us servants and tyrants to one another.*
>
> *"Do you know what it is to be a wage-worker? To work under a master, watchful [jaloux] of his prejudices even more than of his orders; whose dignity consists above all in demanding,* ***sic volo, sic jubeo*** *[Thus I wish. Thus I command], and never explaining; often you have a low opinion of him, and you mock him! Not to have any thought of your own, to*

study without ceasing the thought of others, to know no stimulus except your daily bread, and the fear of losing your job!

"The wage-worker is a man to whom the proprietor who hires his services gives this speech: What you have to do does not concern you at all: you do not control it, you do not answer for it. Every observation is forbidden to you; there is no profit for you to hope for except from your wage, no risk to run, no blame to fear."

Thus modern society was marked by *"the selfish and injurious division, capital and wage-labour."* Or the comments in volume 1 of **System** that the *"period through which we are now passing ... is distinguished by a special characteristic: WAGE-LABOUR"* (*le salariat*) and that the relations of profits to wages reflect *"the war between labour and capital"*! So if, as the **Communist Manifesto** proclaimed, *"Property, in its present form, is based on the antagonism of capital and wage labour*" then it was simply repeating Proudhon's analysis! Similarly, that document asserted that *"Communism deprives no man of the power to appropriate the products of society; all that it does is to deprive him of the power to subjugate the labour of others by means of such appropriation."* Which is simply echoing Proudhon's analysis that the *"proprietor is a man who, having absolute control of an instrument of production, claims the right to enjoy the product of the instrument without using it himself"* and to whom the worker *"has sold and surrendered his liberty."* In a free society *"all accumulated capital being social property, no one can be its exclusive proprietor."* (**What is Property?**, p. 293, p. 130)

Perhaps Marx's only real point is that Proudhon used the word "property" rather than, say, *"capital"* or *"modern bourgeois private property"*? Yet Marx also does this, at times. Marx states communism aims for *"the abolition of bourgeois property"*

Marx's explanation of Bonaparte's coup also drew on this distinction. Hence the apparent paradox of Marx both saying the state machine needed to be smashed ***and*** that universal suffrage could be used to create socialism is no paradox at all, simply a confusion started with Lenin between two different things. So Lenin did not only misrepresent anarchist ideas in **"State and Revolution"** but also Marx and Engels.

Interestingly, the 1848 revolution in France confirmed Proudhon, not Marx. All throughout the revolution Proudhon opposed the creation of a Presidency in the Republic as a source of tyranny and a violation of democratic principles. He also repeatedly attacked Louis Bonaparte as seeking dictatorship. Well, guess what? Bonaparte used his position as executive to organise a coup and seize power. Marx did not see that happening, with the **Communist Manifesto** proclaiming the executive of the state was just a committee for managing the joint affairs of the bourgeoisie. Bonaparte's coup exploded that claim (Marx tried to squeeze this event into his theory, with limited success).

I should also note that in volume 1 of **System** Proudhon argued that the state could not be captured and reformed but instead the working class should organise its social and economic power:

"Thus power, the instrument of collective might, created in society to serve as a mediator between labour and privilege, finds itself inevitably enchained to capital and directed against the proletariat. No political reform can solve this contradiction, since, by the confession of the politicians themselves, such a reform would end only in increasing the energy and extending the sphere of power, and since power would know no way of touching the prerogatives of monopoly without overturning the hierarchy and dissolving society. The problem before the labouring

> *the hostile classes to victory and jeopardize the very foundations of bourgeois society. From the first group it demands that they should not go forward from political to social emancipation; from the others that they should not go back from social to political restoration."* (p. 67)

Some Marxists may object to the obvious conclusion drawn here (although comrades in the SPGB and its sister parties would not). Cliff, for example, states that *"basic Marxist conclusions"* are as follows: *"the workers cannot lay hold of the bourgeois state machine but must smash it and establish a new state based on proletarian democracy (soviets, etc.)"* (p. 27) Yet both Marx and Engels explicitly denied the conclusion that a "new state" had to be created. Both repeatedly suggested that the working class ***could*** seize hold of the bourgeois state and (to use Engels' word) *"refashion"* it. They did so both before ***and*** after the Paris Commune, which showed them (according to Cliff) that "*the working class must smash the capitalist state machine and build a new state.*" (p. 7) The key is to understand that Marx drew a difference between the state and the "state machine." While Lenin confused the two, Marx and Engels did not. Thus we find Engels explaining what Marx meant in **The Civil War in France** by *"The working class cannot take the old state machine to use it to build socialism*":

> *"It is simply a question of showing that the victorious proletariat must first refashion the old bureaucratic, administrative centralised state power before it can use it for its own purposes: whereas all bourgeois republicans since 1848 inveighed against this machinery so long as they were in the opposition, but once they were in the government they took it over without altering it and used it partly against the reaction but still more against the proletariat."* (**Collected Works**, vol. 47, p. 74)

while for Proudhon it is the abolition of *"property."* Does that really warrant the scorn Marx inflicts on Proudhon? Or, worse, that Marx is mindless parroted by his followers to suggest that Proudhon ignored "the relations of production" when, when you read him, he most obviously did not? At worse Proudhon can be criticised for equating property with the dominant form of property around him, bourgeois property, and, as a result, for not mentioning those forms of property which no longer existed!

However, to return to Cliff. His discussion on his "theory" of state capitalism does, despite all his genuflecting to Marx and mocking of Proudhon, ***precisely*** what Marx (falsely) accused Proudhon of doing. Cliff fails to discuss the relations of production in Soviet Russia! He starts as follows:

> *"Marx's analysis of capitalism involves a theory of the relations between the exploiters and the exploited, and among the exploiters themselves. The two main features of the capitalist mode of production are the separation of the workers from the means of production and the transformation of labour power into a commodity which the workers must well in order to live, and the reinvestment of surplus value – the accumulation of capital – which is forced on the individual capitalists by their competitive struggle with one another. Both these features characterised the Soviet Union during the first Five Year Plan (1928–32)."* (p. 34)

Yet workers did not control their workplaces in 1927 and had not since Lenin had started to impose one-man management in 1918! In short, the actual relations of production remained ***unchanged*** in 1928 – workers had to sell their labour to the managers of state-owned workplaces. As such, Cliff's description of Stalinist Russia was also applicable to Leninist Russia,

namely that *"the workers were separated from the means of production, had no say in running the economy and state, and were subordinated to the most monstrous bureaucratic and militarist state machine"* (p. 27) Perhaps the Stalinist bureaucracy was more ruthless, privileged and corrupt than the Leninist one (which was happy to repress strikes) but that does not change the relations of production.

Cliff implicitly acknowledged the unchanging nature of the relations of production when he states that *"industrialisation and technical revolution in agriculture ('collectivisation') in a backward country under condition of siege transformed the bureaucracy, from a layer under the direct and indirect pressure and control of the proletariat, into a ruling class."* (p. 36)

The first notion is easy to refute, that of the USSR being *"under condition of siege"* and so, when viewed within the international economy, there is *"accumulation of capital"* and so it was state capitalist. Perhaps needless to say, the regime was always part of the international economy and in economic and military competition with capitalist nations (and, literally, *"under condition of siege"* for some of that time). That did not change in 1928. Why did such pressure not make Lenin's one-man management regime state-capitalist? Because Lenin and Trotsky were in charge rather than Stalin? Surely not!?!?!?!

Ignoring such obvious historical issues, Cliff's claims are hardly Marxist (if we take by Marxist what Marx and Engels actually wrote rather than what Marxists wished they wrote). Engels stressed that the *"object of production – to produce commodities – **does not import** to the instrument the character of capital"* as the *"production of commodities is one of the preconditions for the existence of capital ... as long as the producer sells only **what he himself** produces, he is not a capitalist; he becomes so only from the moment he makes use of his instrument **to exploit the wage labour of others**."* (**Marx-Engels Collected Works**, Vol. 47, pp. 179–80) He was repeating Marx, who argued that "competition" as such did

use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeois, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e. of the proletariat organised as the ruling class." (**Marx and Engels Reader**, p. 635, p. 717 and p. 490)

So, clearly, the working class becomes the ruling class while the bourgeoisie still owns its property and the key is ***political*** power...

This is confirmed by Marx's analysis of Louis-Bonaparte's coup which saw him expressly state that the bourgeoisie can **cease** to be the ruling class when the political regime changes. The abolition of the republic in 1851, the replacement of the government, was, for him, the end of the political rule of the bourgeoisie as he argued that *"the industrial bourgeoisie applauds with servile bravos the **coup d'état** of December 2, the annihilation of parliament, the downfall of its own rule, the dictatorship of Bonaparte."* He repeated this identification: *"Passing of the parliamentary regime and of bourgeois rule. Victory of Bonaparte."* (**Selected Writings**, pp. 164–5 and p. 166)

Political rule was equated to which party held power and so, logically, universal suffrage was *"the equivalent of political power for the working class ... where the proletariat forms the large majority of the population."* Its *"inevitable result* would be *"**the political supremacy of the working class**."* (**Marx Engels Collected Works**, vol. 11, pp. 335–6) Hence Marx's comment in **The Class Struggles in France 1848 to 1850** (Progress Publishers, 1979):

> *"The classes whose social slavery the constitution is to perpetuate – proletariat, peasantry, petty bourgeoisie – it puts in possession of political power through universal suffrage. And from the class whose old social power it sanctions, the bourgeoisie, it withdraws the political guarantees of this power. It forces the political rule of the bourgeoisie into democratic conditions, which at every moment help*

sures they are the ruling class. Thus *"the bourgeoisie ... has direct ownership over wealth; therefore, whatever the form of government, so long as the bourgeoisie is not expropriated, it does not cease to be the ruling class. A capitalist can own his property in a feudal monarchy, in a bourgeois republic, in a fascist dictatorship, under military rule, under Robespierre, Hitler, Churchill or Attlee."* (p. 25) Yet Cliff also argued that the proletariat was the ruling class in the Paris Commune yet it *"did not statify the means of production at all"* (while the Bolsheviks *"did not do so for some time."*) (p. 29) Which means, surely, that the bourgeoisie remained the ruling class in the Commune and under the Bolsheviks (for some time)?

So we have a paradox, apparently the capitalist class can own its property while the working class is "the ruling class" (and, yes, Cliff used the word "property" without qualification, for which he mocked Proudhon!). Yet it is only a paradox if they want Marx to say what you want him to say rather than what he actually did say (as I've discussed, the "Marxist" analysis of the state put forth by Lenin was no such thing). Marx was well aware that the bourgeoisie had to control political power to be the ruling class. That was why he urged the "political action" of the working classes to secure their "political supremacy" in order to transform society.

Discussing the Paris Commune, Marx noted that it was *"the political form at last discovered [at least by Marx!] under which to work out the economic emancipation of labour,"* and as the *"political rule of the producer cannot coexist with the perpetuation of his social slavery"* the Commune was to *"serve as a lever for uprooting the economic foundations upon which rests the existence of classes."* Engels argued that the *"proletariat seizes the public power, and by means of this transforms the ... means of production ... into public property."* In the **Communist Manifesto** they argued that *"the first step in the revolution by the working class"* is the *"rais[ing] the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy."* The proletariat *"will*

not define capitalism and so the *"character of the production process from which [goods] derive is immaterial"* and so on the market commodities come *"from all modes of production"* (for example, they could be *"the produce of production based on slavery, the product of peasants ..., of a community ... , of state production (such as existed in earlier epochs of Russian history, based on serfdom) or half-savage hunting peoples"*). (**Capital**, vol. 2, pp. 189–90) This means that trade *"exploits a given mode of production but does not create it"* and so relates *"to the mode of production from outside."* (**Capital**, vol. 3, p. 745)

To take an obvious example, did the American Civil War convert the South's slave economy into a capitalist one for Cliff? Probably not, as the Russian Civil War did not, for Cliff, convert Lenin's one-man management economy into state capitalism. For Marx, in contrast, capitalism was a mode of production. It was rooted in wage-labour (*"relations of production"*). Get rid of wage labour and, for Marx, the economy was ***not*** capitalist: *"Let us suppose the workers are themselves in possession of their respective means of production and exchange their commodities with one another. These commodities would not be products of capital."* (**Capital**, vol. 3, p. 276) So to suggest, as Cliff does, that Stalinism was state capitalist because America and Europe were capitalist makes as much sense as stating that Ford is capitalist because GM and Toyota are capitalist...

(The issue of competitive pressures within market economies and their negative consequences is, of course, an important one but, strictly speaking, irrelevant to determining the mode of production. It is relevant, though, to deciding if you wish communism or mutualism – but that is another issue).

Then there is the notion of *"direct and indirect pressure and control."* What "direct" pressure and control did workers have? It was a party dictatorship and managers were appointed by the state – and had been for nearly a decade. As for "indirect" pressure, that would presumably be the same means by which

workers in capitalist workers have – strikes and other forms of direct action against their bosses. So 1928 did not mark any significant change in the actual "relations of production" as is clear from Cliff's own account of the process (and that of his followers).

It is easy to understand why Cliff ignored the ***actual*** "relations of production" in Bolshevik Russia while rhetorically invoking them: if he did look at them he would conclude that Russia had been state capitalist under his idols Lenin and Trotsky. As anarchists had long argued, replacing the private boss with the state was no real transformation. As Proudhon suggested in volume 1 of **System** with regards to Jacobin socialist Louis Blanc:

> *"Has M. Blanc touched the problem of value, which involves in itself alone all others? He does not even suspect its existence. Has he given a theory of distribution? No. Has he solved the antinomy of the division of labour, perpetual cause of the worker's ignorance, immorality, and poverty? No. Has he caused the contradiction of machinery and wage-labour to disappear, and reconciled the rights of association with those of liberty? On the contrary, M. Blanc consecrates this contradiction."*

So state socialism *"consecrates"* wage-labour, only now to the state. Hence the need for a third alternative based on associated labour, again from **System** volume 1:

> *"Either competition, – that is, monopoly and what follows; or exploitation by the State, – that is, dearness of labour and continuous impoverishment; or else, in short, a solution based upon equality, – in other words, the organisation of labour, which involves the negation of political economy and the end of property."*

The experience of Leninist Russia confirms Proudhon's in terms of economic social relationships. Unsurprisingly, it also supports his arguments that state socialism would be repressive and its aim for a "servant" state rather than a "master" state (to use Blanc's expression) was utopian. To quote Proudhon:

> *"That between labour and liberty, like capital and government, there is a kinship and identification: so that instead of four parties such as we had in the land but recently, placing us in turn in the economic point of view and in the political point of view, there are really only two: the party of labour or liberty and the party of capital or government. And these two propositions* ***– abolition of man's exploitation of his fellow-man and abolition of the man's government of his fellow-man*** *– amount to one and the same proposition; that finally the revolutionary IDEA, despite the dualism in its formula, is one and indivisible, as is the Republic itself: universal suffrage implying negation of capital's preponderance and equality of wealth, just as equality of wealth and the abolition of interest are implicit in negation of government."*

Ultimately, as well as typically capitalist relations in production the Leninist regime also had a typical state structure. The change from Tsarist to Leninist to Stalinist regimes did not transform much other than who was giving the orders. To quote Cliff's words back at him: *"the form of government changed to a greater or lesser degree, but the type of state remained the same – 'special bodies of armed men, prisons, etc.', independent of the people and serving the capitalist class."* (p. 30) Moving from private to state capitalist was no great change, as Proudhon constantly re-iterated.

There is a strange paradox in Cliff's account. He is at pains to stress that bourgeois ownership of "wealth" (property!) en-